

Abolitionism and the Underground Railroad in Schuylerville

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In the 1850s, Daniel Meader was a Schuylerville businessman and local resident. He was also involved with the Underground Railroad. "Uncle Daniel," as he was referred to in his 1887 obituary, was one of many of the greater Schuylerville area residents that were staunch supporters of the Abolitionist Movement.

The Village of Schuylerville is known throughout the world for its rich and unique history. Its known history dates back to prehistoric eras, when Native American peoples set up seasonal camps along the Hudson River and Fish Creek, benefiting from the abundant game and vegetation. During the French and Indian wars, early settlements were the sites of French raiding party sacks, and during the American Revolution, the Village of Schuylerville played a pertinent role in the infamous Surrender at Saratoga, the turning point of the American Revolution. The water power of Fish Creek and the Hudson River was harnessed by early industrialists, making Schuylerville a prominent and wealthy mill village. The Champlain Canal also came through the Village, and the Village hosted a turn around basin, and dry docks. Another layer to Schuylerville's rich history that is currently being brought to light is the history of the reformists that lived in the area during the 19th century.

National reform movements such as Women's Suffrage, Temperance, and Abolitionism began to grow and strengthen during the 1830's. These reform movements were linked with one another; most often a person that was a member of an Abolitionist Society was also involved with both the Temperance and Women's Suffrage movements. In the Village of Schuylerville and the surrounding areas, the Abolitionist movement was strong. Many of the residents of the area were Quaker or of Quaker origin and the Quakers were abolitionists according to their doctrine. As the Second Great Awakening swept through the country, other religious groups also condemned slavery and became vocal in the abolitionist cause.

Numerous Abolitionist Societies began to form in Saratoga County beginning in the 1830's. The greater Schuylerville area had two: the Quaker Springs Anti-Slavery Society, founded in 1836, and the Old Saratoga Anti-Slavery Society, founded in 1850. Members of these societies lobbied politicians, published abolitionist papers, and invited abolitionist speakers into their communities. Some of these local abolitionists were also active in moving fugitive slaves to "safe places;" places that ensured the fugitive slave of their freedom.

Famous abolitionist speakers were often invited to local anti-slavery meetings to rally support for the cause and to discuss undertakings and accomplishments of the movement. On June 8, 1849, the most notable abolitionist speaker arrived in the Village of Schuylerville; Mr. Frederick Douglass. Frederick Douglass, former slave turned ardent abolitionist, spent three days in the area, lecturing first in the Village proper, and then in the hamlets of Quaker Springs and Dean's Corners. He stated in his paper, *The North Star*, "I had a quiet an undisturbed meeting [in Schuylerville], and circulated a number of my Narratives, which may pave the way for anti-slavery effort in that place." In Quaker Springs, at the Friends Meeting House, Mr. Douglass stated that he "addressed a large audience who listened with attention during the space of two hours." Other notable speakers that participated in area anti-slavery meetings included William Lloyd Garrison, Henry Stanton (husband of Elizabeth Cady Stanton), and Parker Pillsbury.

Anti-slavery papers often published the minutes of local abolitionist society meetings. Included in an 1852 edition of *The Liberator*, are minutes of the Old Saratoga Anti-Slavery

Society. The minutes show that at this two-day meeting, both William Lloyd Garrison and Parker Pillsbury addressed the members. The minutes also show that discussions were had regarding publishing member essays, voting on resolutions, and creating committees. Additionally, these minutes record many members of this society. Listed in these minutes are the names of numerous Schuylerville area residents, such as Isaac Griffin, whose homes were used as stops on the Underground Railroad.

Stops for fugitive slaves in Schuylerville and the greater Schuylerville area were needed. The Hudson River and the Champlain Canal are well documented as being used by fugitive slaves as passageways to freedom. Both of these waterways ran through the Village of Schuylerville. Abolitionists in this area provided a safe house for a fugitive slave to rest at before continuing on to Washington County and beyond, following the Hudson River or riding on the Champlain Canal, north on their flight toward freedom.